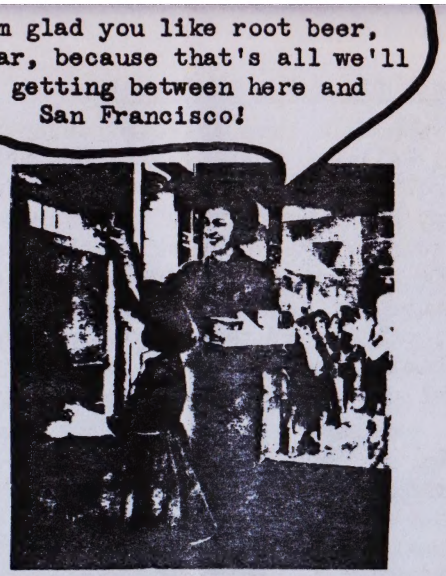

CONTEST WINNERS

RTN's contest to write an appropriate caption for the picture of a lady using a food machine in a railroad automat car, announced in the January 18 issue, brought a volley of response.

Two readers tied for our prize, and they will each receive a six-month subscription to RTN. The caption above comes from Albert Herskovits of New York City.

Frank C. Barry of Harrington Park, New Jersey is our other winner. Evidently Mr. Barry has had a lot of first-hand experience with automat machines, for he was inspired to write a whole list of appropriate captions. His winning entry was: "And they call Jesse James a train robber!"

We must mention two of Mr. Barry's other entries: "If Railpax is like this, I'm writing to Volpe!" and "I have to smile; I'm on Candid Camera!"

Congratulations to both of our winners, and many thanks to everyone who submitted entries!

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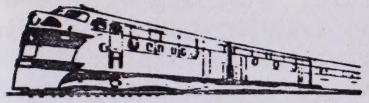

Volume 1 March 15, 1971 Number 8

Yosemite by Train

Contest Winners

ON THE COVER: To illustrate our article "Yosemite by Train," starting on page 5, we present a photo of the SP depot in Merced, California. Shown is the entire back end of the 1928 building. The Yosemite Transportation System has its office and bus waiting room in the north end of the building. Passengers are boarding the northbound SP train 51, the San Joaquin Daylight. This is a portion of the original Ektachrome-X slide made by the author early in January 1971. George Hyko, our author, is a San Francisco based railfan and writer. We hope you like his story.

YOSEMITE dominates this issue of RTN, and is also the cover story of Metrolines, southbound edition, of Jan. 28-Feb. 10. Metrolines is the little publication for Metroliner riders that gives information about their trip and tells what's happening at their destination. In this case the cover shows an unusual picture of John Muir, the conservationist responsible for creating the park, writing in his notebook. This is by way of pointing out a free exhibit of photos of Muir and Yosemite in Washington. The magazine has a regular section of free event listings for the budgeting tourist. (Thanks to Richard B. Shull, N.Y.C.)

LETTERS

I have just received my first copy of RTN and I am most favorably impressed. I wish it well and may it grow with expanding circulation.

I note in one sentence on page 6: "the real competitor of the rails is the auto." You can write from now to Doomsday and never say a truer word. ...

Will merely running the trains bring people flocking back to the depots? The automobile is too much a part of American living, as much as the refrigerator and the super market. Your car is at your back door ready to take you across town or across the nation.

It is the nerve-killing long drive people have now come to dread. TAKE YOUR CAR WITH YOU ON THE TRAIN. It is such a comfort--and cheaper in the long run.

Stephen Goby,
Gyro Rail Car Company
Cleveland, Ohio

(Mr. Goby is involved in design of innovative auto-on-train cars. For news of auto-carrying passenger trains, see elsewhere in this issue.)

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Railpax Starts to Collect Its Rolling Stock

The "biggest thing to happen to railroad passengers since the invention of the Pullman car" is how Merelice England described Railpax in the Christian Science Monitor March 8. And one of the most exciting train-watching episodes in the history of railroading is getting underway as passengers await a glimpse of the first cars in new Railpax colors.

The Philadelphia engineering consulting firm of Louis T. Klauder has been commissioned by Railpax to inspect railroad cars, engines, and terminals. As each car is inspected, a bright orange sticker is applied. In black print the name "National Rail Passenger Corporation" appears at the top, and the following information below: car number, railroad, date and place of inspection.

An unofficial red, white and blue color scheme for cars is being tried. In Washington's Union Station March 7 a B&O slumbercoach was seen with these colors on one side only. The name panel was left blank. Railpax reportedly is considering using the name "Amerail" on its cars--a word more euphonious than "Railpax" in the judgment of some. The slumbercoach bore a 9-inch wide red panel running lengthwise below its lower windows, and above them a 2-inch similar blue band. The blue was a bit small to be visible at a distance.

On the San Francisco Chief last weekend a car was seen bearing the NRPC inspection sticker. This does not necessarily mean that Santa Fe has yet joined Railpax, even though it is known that NRPC plans to use 73 of ATSF's bilevel coaches; some railroads might lease their equipment to the corporation. A Santa Fe passenger agent in the Southwest reflected some of the confusion that's current: not knowing officially if his company has bought into Railpax, he must let a large stack of Summer travel reservations pile up, unable to act on them.

Chances are that the locomotives Railpax leases from the railroads will also be painted in Railpax colors. Among the rolling stock lined up so far are 143 domes of various types--sleepers, lounges, coaches and diners--, 310 regular coaches, and 6 rail diesel cars. Twelve bilevel coaches from C&NW are also on their lists.

Canadian National Re-evaluates the Turbo Train

CN is now evaluating its entire Turbo Train program. United Aircraft has completed repairs on all damaged CN turbos, and the builder awaits word from Canada. If CN decides against further use of them, the Department of Transportation will lease the equipment from United for use on the New York to Boston Shore Line route.

The Chances of a Rail Strike

The United Transportation Union, with 190,000 members, has been legally free since March 1 to call a strike. But Charles Luna, the union's leader and one of eight Railpax directors, is unwilling to call a nationwide strike since Congress will likely intervene in such an event and force a settlement. A wildcat strike or "selective walkout" was considered against BN and SCL, but a Federal judge ruled such a move illegal. Now the union is appealing that ruling. Just before the ruling, another judge had decided that the UTU's selective strikes last July 7 were legal. Talks had been progressing until March 6 when they stalled over the topic of work rules.

Penn Central Asks Congress to Give Railpax More Money

PC has told a House committee that the Railpax corporation should have more funds in order to pay the railroads higher fees for operating the corporations trains. PC needs the money badly, and it is having difficulty negotiating an appropriate fee with Railpax.

Use Trans-Hudson Tunnel More, Study Says

Last year the Governors of New York and New Jersey named a task force to study ways to improve public transportation between the two states. The first report came out March 10, and it suggested heavier use of the trans-Hudson tunnel owned by Penn Central. The tunnel is now used by long distance passenger trains and commuter trains from southern New Jersey int Pennsylvania Station. At most, 14 trains an hour now use the tunnel, but it could accommodate 26 with upgraded technology. The report recommended building connections in New Jersey wit the Erie Lackawanna into the tunnel and modernizing Jersey Central facilities so its commute trains can use the tunnel. These 2 lines now end in New Jersey, and riders must transfer

Initial Losses for Railpax Predicted

The Federal Railroad Administration is forecasting a loss of $50 million after taxes in the first year of Railpax operation, and $25 million the second year. Beyond that, evidently, no predictions are being made.

Carry Your Car on the Train?

ICC approval is being asked by Auto Train Corp. to run trains to Florida from the Northeast carrying cars plus passengers. The corporation would lease the tracks from the rail roads. In France, car-carrying trains increased in usage 21% in one year. British Rail is increasing capacity by 20,000 cars and 5 new routes, for a total of 27 routes this year.

YOSEMITE by train

by George Hyko

A Winter visit to Yosemite National Park is an experience to treasure. And the best way to get there is by train. We went on a slow weekday in New Year's week, leaving the S.F. Bay Area on SP's San Joaquin Daylight which reaches Merced at 11:47 AM. At one time you could transfer here to a delightful little train that took you almost to the park boundary. But no more. Public transportation now tries to be efficient but unpicturesque. Yosemite Park has its own bus connection. The office is at the end of the SP Merced depot. Bus schedules change periodically, but for us there was a wait of nearly 3 hours 45 minutes until the big green bus fumed off.

What's to do in Merced for almost 4 hours on a quiet Winter day? The first thing is to have lunch, and adjoining the depot are at least 3 eating places whose food far outranks the cardboard crud from the Daylight's "Automatic Buffet Car."

But then what? Merced is a valley town of 22,698 souls, plopped in the middle of agricultural country undergoing a transition from cotton, fruit and vegetable growing to an experimentation with varietal wine grapes. There are no stupendous tourist attractions within easy distance.

We walked a few blocks to the Merced County library and spent time sampling the flavorful history of the area. Joaquin Murietta, the 19th century bandit, hung out near here. The Yosemite Valley Railroad, until its demise in 1945, ran little steam trains from Merced to El Portal, carrying passengers and freight. It even built the present road the rest of the way into Yosemite Valley.

The bus left promptly at 3:30. Besides us there were five young people and a gray-haired lady aboard. The bus turned east on two-lane highway 140, the "all-year highway" to the main park entrance. We straight-arrowed beside the Santa Fe mainline tracks 9 miles to Planada, where the gray-haired lady got off. The bus serves valley residents, including a number of Indians, in addition to vacationers. At Planada the road veered slightly north, leaving the tracks. Planada was originally Geneva, a station on the San Francisco and San Joaquin Valley Railway, till Santa Fe bought the company in 1900.

The lowering Winter sun created a lovely lighting effect over the valley. The rich green rainy season grass was everywhere, and little rivulets ran among rock outcroppings. The whole scene was suffused with golden sunlight, and the gray-

blue Sierras began to loom up ahead. Imperceptibly the grade of the road steepened from flat valley to foothills with scrub oak, then pines, and the road began to curve this way and that. I was happy not to be driving. We could watch each detail of the changing countryside, and felt in good hands when we reached the icy curves of the Merced River canyon.

There was a rest stop at Cedar Lodge, a small resort on the Merced River, but it was now too dark and cold to do any exploration. We alighted at our lodging place 2 hours 50 minutes after boarding the bus.

There is daily bus service between Yosemite Valley and the Badger Pass Ski House. Ask your desk clerk about time schedules.

Praising the wonders of Yosemite in the Winter is not my purpose; I want to describe the transportation. Yet the two are closely intertwined. Yosemite is wondrous in Winter in large part because so few automobiles are there. There still seem to be too many, but the contrast with the Summer traffic mess is striking.

Feeling very virtuous that we'd brought no car to foul up the fresh mountain air, and feeling strangely free that we had no four-wheeled appendage to cater to and to worry over in the sub-freezing nights, we went about with abandon.

Renting snowshoes--we wished we'd brought our own, or our cross-country skies, when we saw the fee, which would have been easy to manage via the train and bus baggage checking--we squished around in the foot of snow on the valley floor. The days were sunny, with the temperature nearly 60 at the peak of the short afternoons.

It was simple to wander in any direction without having to allot time and energy to return to our car. Anywhere in the valley you can walk to a shuttle bus stop. The 25¢ buses circle the valley continuously--on New Year's Eve operating until 1:30 AM. Stimulating public transportation is a part of the National Park Service's plan announced last June to phase out private autos in the park. So far the eastern end of the valley has been closed to cars and the shuttle bus service pushed. Later a parking area will be made outside the park boundary and a public transit system arranged to bring visitors in without their smog-belching vehicles.

In Summer there's nowhere in the valley to escape roaring traffic and blaring horns. In Winter you can frequently stand in the middle of the valley and hear not a sound. Then you can appreciate the Yosemite that John Muir so lovingly described. But just follow a trail that crosses one of the narrow valley roads and you'd better watch your step! As you gingerly tread the slippery ice of the road a car will inevitably come speeding at you and force you to move quickly, risking a slide on the ice before the oncoming auto. There may be fewer drivers, but they move faster, and you can be certain most of them have no skill in handling a car on a glazed road.

Other buses take you to the Badger Pass ski area. These we found well patronized. Badger was much busier than the valley. The road climbed steeply to 7300 feet, where the snow depth was 80 inches, and is recommended for skillful drivers only.

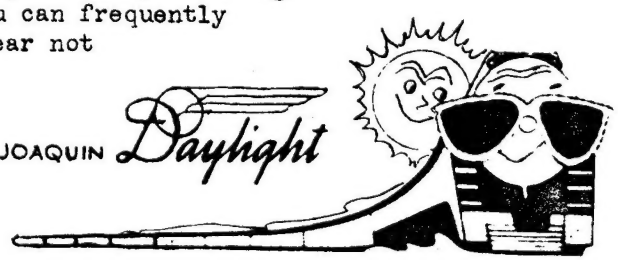
We left Yosemite regretfully at 11:20 AM on the one daily bus back to Merced. A thin overcast thickened as we lost altitude. Now in the daylight we could follow every foot of the roadbed of the old Yosemite Valley R.R. across the Merced River from the highway. The rails are gone, but crumbling wooden trestles remain and fills carefully built up with rounded native rocks. We tried to imagine the thrill we'd never experienced of twisting around those canyon curves just a few feet above the river, behind a puffing little steamer.

Another rest stop at Cedar Lodge and a chance to walk to the river edge for a closer look at the old right-of-way. Above it was an old trail whose origin was a mystery to me.

Our bus had 25 passengers, 7 of whom got off at the Greyhound depot, the first stop. At 1:55 we reached the end of the line at the SP station. Our first train had been 17 minutes late. Now the northbound train 51 from Los Angeles pulled in 15 minutes behind schedule. Normally there's only a 13-minute wait between bus and train. Going to Yosemite from L.A., the change is at Fresno, which also has a Yosemite bus that reaches the park through the south entrance. In Summer another bus runs between Yosemite and Lake Tahoe.

The sky was very gray now. We boarded our train, hoping to sit in the rounded rear observation car, but were directed to the car ahead of it. We chose seats near the rear to have the most view. The conductor wanted to relocate us near the front of the car and reverse one seat so we could face each other. No thanks, we don't like riding backwards, and prefer the view here. For some unknown reason SP conductors always try to move us once we've settled into seats we like.

It was a very down day, on the verge of rain, deep in the holiday season. Still the train was fairly well filled.



The San Joaquin Daylight seems to attract people of every possible variety. An SP man in the valley told us we were unusual, that only people over 50 rode trains now. He must have been brainwashed by some railroad propaganda--maybe he never looks at the trains that go through--because it was obvious that individuals of all ages and walks of life were riding. That's always been my experience with this train. Somehow I felt offended by his comment. Did it imply that trains should be eliminated because only "over-fifties" ride them? I'll be over fifty myself someday and should resent such discrimination. Should we eliminate baby carriages because only infants use them? It doesn't make sense, and besides it's simply false.

The day we came a local couple with grandfather and a your boy boarded at Modesto and traveled the 37 miles to Merced to await the northbound train back. The little boy had never ridden a train and they were out to give him the experience before the trains are removed. I told the grandfather we were bound for Yosemite and he was very interested. He'd never heard of the Yosemite bus before.

An SP employee said that in the old days the stations were jammed with people who rode dozens of trains through the valley. But the railroad just doesn't want them now. He quoted the head of SP as calling passenger trains "horse and buggies for little old ladies." We saw more "little old ladies" driving on the parallel highway 99 than on our train.

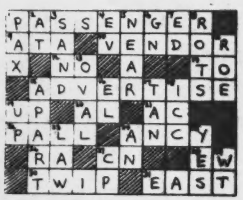
The straight-arrow highways here are tolerable only if you can stand much monotony. All Summer the valley is oppressively hot, and Winters are mild but bring frequent ground fogs that cut driving visibility to zero. The most scenic parts of the route are near the north and south ends--winding along the shore of San Francisco Bay and traversing the Tehachapi range. The Daylight always carried a full-length dome car during Summer and Christmas seasons, but now it was replaced with an ordinary lounge car. Spartan as it is, however, the train is the best way to go.

Most of the railroad crew were pleasant or at least neutral, but there are always one or two on this train who seem to be specially dedicated in following the company policy of discouraging passengers. And one such individual can sour your whole trip and lead you to take the bus next time.

On the trip down, two employees occupied six seats in our coach. At Martinez, where passengers from the Northwest make a connection, they were all directed into our car until only a few single seats remained. The last one aboard was a hapless young lady with a little boy and a nursing

infant. One of the SP men directed her into two of the seats the other employee had been using and left. The second man returned and made her switch to the four seats occupied by the first. This was repeated for nearly a quarter hour until the confused girl, juggling two children and some luggage, seemed near tears. No one saw fit to inform her that there were four other nearly empty coaches behind in which she could easily have found room. This was typical of the seemingly deliberate fabrication of problems for the passenger, the creation of difficulties and embarrassing situations where none need exist, that so frequently occur on present-day trains. It seems a minor miracle that anyone rides the trains at all. Somehow missed schedules and mechanical breakdowns are easier to take than personal harassment and subtle insult.

It was dark now and starting to rain as we pulled in 7 minutes late to the Bay Area. It was probably the last time we'd ride the San Joaquin Daylight. Rail service will likely be eliminated next May. I was sad. In spite of the railroads' attitudes I prefer train travel. Public transportation to National Parks as well as to urban centers may be the wave of the future, but will trains be a part of it?



SOLUTION TO THE RAILROAD CROSSWORD PUZZLE FROM LAST ISSUE

Special thanks are due to Paul Halbach and Paul Yurko who supplied material for the news summary on page 3.

Subscribe to Rail Travel Newsletter for yourself and for gifts to friends. Yearly subscription is only four dollars. For this amount you receive the latest scandal about passenger trains twice a month--the freshest news you can find all in one place.

(In the next issue we make the first report on an exclusive survey of travelers' attitudes and opinions about the railroads of America. Don't miss this exciting feature you'll find only in RTN. We'll also have a small remembrance in honor of the first anniversary of the last California Zephyr. Tell your friends to subscribe now and start with the next exciting issue.)

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P.S.: Gift subscriptions can be had for 6 months--12 issues--for only $2, and we'll acknowledge your name as donor.

QUOTES OF THE WEEK ***

"The future for rail passenger trains lies in runs of less than 300 miles--and in rare exceptions, perhaps 300 to 500 miles."

--Robert Nelson, head of the Office of High Speed Ground Transportation and promoter of the Metroliner project

"Personally, I don't see railroads regaining any position in long-distance passenger service. We should maintain a minimum of such service. But it won't grow. By 1985, 85 to 90% of the people will live in population corridors. The demand for mobility still will be strong, and it will be for short-stage distances. Railpax will show that in such cases--300 to 400 miles--trains can be competitive with planes. If they can carry 60 to 70% capacity, they will make money."

--James M. Beggs, Undersecretary of Transportation, quoted in Christian Science Monitor March 8

"Just as the stagecoach had no role when the railroad came along, running passenger trains is detrimental to the whole railroad system."

--James A. Schultz, Association of American Railroads, quoted in Christian Science Monitor March 8

. . . . . .

EDITORIAL: TWO ROUTES FOR CALIFORNIA

One of the decisions Railpax will make soon is which north south route in California between San Francisco and Los Angeles to incorporate in the Seattle-San Diego segment of the nationwide network. The present Coast Route is 470 miles and requires 9 hours 50 minutes; the San Joaquin Valley Route is 482 miles and takes 11 hours 20 minutes.

At least 3 Congressmen from the Valley are asking Railpax to choose their inland route. Senator Alan Cranston is asking for both routes.

Up till now it seemed most likely that the scenic Coast run would be chosen and the Valley route allowed to disappear. But Valley spokesmen have made strong points that rail service is necessary in their area; ground fog is frequent and air service is being reduced. Trains also serve 3 national parks nearby, and the Park Service, though short of funds, wants to promote public transportation. We will watch closely the progress of this debate and hope it will be settled to the satisfaction of all West Coast rail travelers.

COMMUTING AND RAPID TRANSIT

More Trouble for Muni on Market Street

San Francisco seems to have a flair for colorful problems on its Municipal Railway. The latest event happened in the afternoon of March 12 when sudden torrential rains created flooding in a Bay Area Rapid Transit subway excavation. Temporary streetcar tracks which skirt the large hole began to sink into soft ground, and a long line of streetcars was tied up for 3 hours until water was drained out.

In other news, officials are considering free midday fares on some Muni vehicles to urge people to use public transit more and keep polluting cars out of the downtown area.

Staten Island Slowly Changes

The B&O Railroad owns Staten Island Rapid Transit line, and runs electric cars built in the mid-20's between St. George and Tottenville (giving rise to the nickname "Toonerville Trolley"). The Metropolitan Transportation Authority will soon take over ownership of the line, and the old cars are scheduled to be replaced in 2 years, along with other updating alterations. The change of ownership has been delayed by red tape; the MTA approved purchase of the line over a year ago.

Meanwhile the traditional 5¢ fare on the Staten Island ferry was threatened to be raised to 25¢. A storm of complaints resulted in a final decision last week that the old fare would stay but vehicle fares would rise.

HOW TO KILL A PASSENGER TRAIN No. 8 of a series

Some shortsighted railroad executives have been heard voicing the opinion that their worries are over now that Railpax is taking over operation of passenger problems. Not so! Railroads are better off with no passenger trains at all clogging their rails that should be clear for the freight to go through, or for faster sale as real estate in the event that freight revenues drop a bit more. The forward-looking manager will be alert to all possibilities for making Railpax a dismal failure. Some of the plans adopted in the past for discouraging rail travel may still be usable. However, it remains to be seen how actual operations proceed under NRPC. Many new ploys may be needed. You can rely on this column to keep you posted concerning the most effective methods for dealing with this new and seriously threatening form of public intervention in our business.